

ADDRESSING TRAUMA

THROUGH THE

ARTS



A **TOOLKIT** to create

Regulation, Relationship, & Resiliency

in the classroom



Level 1: Brainstem and Diencephalon

• Regulation •

Level 1 focuses on regulating the brainstem and the diencephalon, the areas of the brain that control the body's basic life functions like breathing, heart rate, blood pressure, sleep, body pressure, hunger and emotions. It also plays a key role in **survival responses**—like fight, flight, freeze, or fawn—by reacting quickly to perceived danger and preparing the body to respond. It acts as a relay center, sending messages between the brain and spinal cord.

By finding ways to **foster safety and calm** in the brainstem and diencephalon, the arts can help promote predictability through regulating breathe and heart rate and bringing the nervous system out of a stress state; offer a place for safe physical expression, helping release stored tension or energy from the body; and provide sensory-rich calming input that helps the brainstem feel safe and grounded.

Use Level 1 in order to:

- Create safe spaces for connection and collaboration
- Develop routine and repetition for expectations
- Generate calm and peaceful environments through sensory experiences



Rhythmic Drawing

Ages: 5+

Type of Art: Music, Visual Art

Goals:

- To regulate the nervous system through *repetitive, rhythmic* drawing.
- To foster group collaboration and flexibility by contributing to shared, evolving artwork, encouraging *relational* and *respectful* interaction.
- To integrate auditory, visual, and motor input for sensory grounding and focus, supporting a *relevant* and *rewarding* multisensory experience.

Materials/Set-up:

- Large paper or butcher paper (mounted on tables or the floor; one shared piece per small group or full class)
- Drawing tools (paint markers work really well, but you can also use crayons, markers, oil pastels—tools that allow for expressive, gestural marks)
- Music with a steady beat (instrumental works well; avoid music with words; vary tempo and mood)
- Open space for students to move around the drawing

Directions:

1. Set the Environment: Lay out large paper surfaces and arrange students evenly around them. Play music softly in the background as students enter. Create a calm or energizing atmosphere, depending on your goal.
2. Introduce the Activity:
 - “We’re going to draw with the music—but not just by ourselves. You’ll work on one big drawing together, moving and adding to each other’s lines.”
 - Emphasize that the activity is about movement, rhythm, and collaboration—not making a ‘perfect’ picture.
3. Warm-Up:
 - Practice drawing rhythmically in the air to a music sample—big loops, zig-zags, tapping motions.
 - Ask, “How does your hand want to move when the music is fast? What about when it’s slow?”

4. Begin Rhythmic Drawing:

- Students begin drawing to the beat of the music on the section in front of them. Encourage flowing, repetitive, rhythmic marks that match the tempo.
- Let them draw for 1-2 minutes. Call out a gentle reminder: “Listen to the beat. Let your hand follow the rhythm.”

5. Rotate Around the Paper:

- Pause the music. Instruct students to rotate one space clockwise around the paper.
- Once everyone is in a new spot, restart the music with a new tempo, style, or energy. Students begin drawing again—adding onto or responding to what’s already there.
- Repeat rotations, depending on time and group energy.

6. Final Round (Optional):

- For the last round, allow students to return to their original spot and see how their section has changed. Give them time to add final touches or responses.

7. Reflection & Discussion:

- Invite students to step back and look at the whole piece together.
- Facilitate reflection:
 - “How did it feel to add onto someone else’s drawing?”
 - “What surprised you about the way your drawing changed?”
 - “How did the music change the way you moved or created?”

Adaption Tips:

- Vary music selections for different rhythms, emotional tones, or energy levels.
- For younger students, mark rotation spots clearly to guide movement.



BrainDance Movement Sequence

(by Anne Green Gilbert)

Ages: 3+

Type of Art: Dance

Goals:

- To support brain-body integration through a sequence of patterned, *rhythmic* movements.
- To foster regulation, focus, and coordination by engaging sensory systems tied to early developmental movement patterns, enhancing *repetitive* practice and *relevant* sensory input.
- To create a calming, centering *routine* that can be used daily basis.

Materials/Set-up:

- Open space for movement
- Soft instrumental music or rhythmic drumming

Directions:

1. Introduce BrainDance: Explain to students that BrainDance is a fun movement sequence designed to help their brain and body feel more connected, focused, and ready to learn. “These movements are like brain food!”
2. Movement Sequence: Lead students through each of the eight BrainDance patterns, encouraging slow, focused movement. Emphasize breathing and full-body engagement throughout.
 1. Breath: Inhale through the nose, exhale through the mouth. Repeat several deep breaths to begin grounding.
 2. Tactile: Lightly squeeze or tap the body from head to toe—“Wake up the body!”
 3. Core-Distal: Stretch out wide like a star, then curl in tight like a seed. Repeat several times with energy.
 4. Head-Tail: Move the head and tailbone/spine like a wave (e.g., cat-cow stretch or seated spine rolls).
 5. Upper-Lower: Move only the upper body while the lower half stays still, then reverse. (E.g., arm circles, then leg marches.)
 6. Body Side: Move the right side of the body independently, then the left. Try reaching, stepping, or stretching one side at a time.

7. Cross-Lateral: Cross the midline with movement (e.g., elbow to opposite knee, reaching across the body).

8. Vestibular (Spin & Balance): Spin gently in one direction, pause, then spin the other way. End with balancing on one foot or holding a still pose.

3. Tempo and Rhythm: Adjust tempo based on student energy levels. Use slow, calming rhythms for regulation or upbeat tempos to energize.

Adaptation Tips:

- For younger children, simplify or narrate each section (“Now we stretch like a star! Now we curl into a ball!”).
- For older students, add more complex cross-body movements or balance challenges.
- Seated adaptations can be used as needed.



Mindful Scribble Drawing

Ages: 5+

Type of Art: Visual Art

Goals:

- To facilitate calm and safety by encouraging a non-judgmental creative process, emphasizing *respectful* and *relevant* self-expression.
- To incorporate rhythm using music as a guide for drawing movements, supporting *rhythmic* and *repetitive* regulation.

Materials/Set-up:

- Paper (any size, standard printer paper or sketchbook paper works well)
- Drawing tools: pens (gel pens, fine-liners), markers, colored pencils, or crayons
- Music for a calming atmosphere and giving students a repetitive beat to match

Directions:

1. Set the Environment: Help students find a comfortable, quiet area. Consider dimming lights and minimizing distractions.
2. Guide Initial Focus: Ask students to close their eyes or look down. Lead them in a few deep breaths to bring awareness to the present moment.
3. Initiate Blind Scribbling: Announce, "With eyes closed or looking away, make continuous, free-flowing lines on your paper for 30-60 seconds. Let your hand move spontaneously with the music's rhythm."
4. Transition to Observation: After time, instruct students to "Open your eyes and look at your scribble. Notice the lines, curves, and enclosed shapes."
5. Encourage Discovery: Guide students to "Gently look at your scribble. Do you see any recognizable objects, faces, animals, or abstract shapes within the lines? Let your imagination play."
6. Direct Outlining or Coloring: Explain, "Now, choose some discovered shapes or areas to outline or fill with color. Use different colors to highlight sections, creating a vibrant, abstract piece. Work intuitively." Encourage choice of colors that resonate.
7. Facilitate Reflection: When complete, ask students to "Take a moment to observe your piece." Lead a brief discussion or private reflection on: "How do you feel after this activity? What did you notice about the process? Did you feel more calm or focused?"



Rhythmic Walk

Ages: 6+

Type of Art: Music, Dance

Goals:

- To explore *rhythmic* patterns and spatial awareness through continuous group movement while building on classroom relationships, encouraging *relational* connection.
- To promote coordination and group focus through *repetitive* practice of patterned movement, making the activity *rewarding* and *relevant* to social-emotional learning.

Materials/Set-up:

- Open space for walking (e.g., classroom, gym, outdoor path)
- Music with a clear, steady beat (various tempos can be explored)

Directions:

1. **Introduce Rhythm and Movement:** Begin by discussing how rhythm is found in nature (e.g., heartbeat, footsteps, waves), and even our own bodies. Explain that today, students will explore walking with a natural rhythm, then add a musical beat, focusing on continuous group patterns.
2. **Rhythmic Warm-up (Natural Rhythm & Circle Formation):** Ask students to form a large circle. Encourage them to march in place, finding a comfortable, steady pace without music. Introduce the concept of an "8-count" by counting aloud with their natural pace: "1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8, 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8."
3. **Group Rhythmic Walk with Continuous 8-Count Patterns (Without Music)**
 - **Continuous 8-Count Patterns:** Lead the group through the following sequence, repeating or cycling as desired:
 - **8 Steps Forward:** Take 8 steps moving forward around the circle on the 8-count.
 - **7 Steps Forward, 1 Step Back:** Take 7 steps forward, then 1 step back on the next 8-count.
 - **6 Steps Forward, 2 Steps Back:** Take 6 steps forward, then 2 steps back on the next 8-count.
 - **Continue the Pattern:** Lead students to continue this decreasing forward, increasing backward pattern (e.g., 5 Fwd, 3 Back; 4 Fwd, 4 Back; 3 Fwd, 5 Back; 2 Fwd, 6 Back; 1 Fwd, 7 Back).
 - **(Optional) Reversing the Pattern:** After reaching 1 Fwd, 7 Back, you can reverse the pattern back towards 8 Steps Forward.

4. Adding Music: After students have a good grasp of the patterns and unison movement without music, introduce music with a clear, steady 8 beat. Challenge them to continue the patterns, now synchronized with the music.
 - Guidance: Clearly vocalize the counts and the movement to start ("Eight forward! One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight! Now, seven forward, one back! One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, back!").
 - If you're not successful the first time - keep trying!
5. Reflect and Share: After the activity, lead a discussion:
 - "How did it feel to walk precisely to the beat as a group, especially with the music?"
 - "What did you notice about your body when you were moving with the music in sync with others?"



Play Dough for Emotional Regulation

Ages: 4+

Type of Art: Visual Art

Goals:

- To provide a tactile and sensory outlet for expressing and regulating emotions, offering a *relevant* and *rewarding* creative experience.
- To support calming and grounding through *repetitive* manipulation and sensory input, encouraging *respectful* self-care.

Materials/Set-up:

- Play dough (various colors, store-bought or homemade)
- Flat, clean surface (e.g., table, placemat)
- (Optional) Small tools for sculpting (e.g., plastic knives, rollers, cookie cutters, toothpicks)
- (Optional) Calming music

Directions:

1. **Introduce Emotional Expression:** Discuss emotions and explain that play dough can help understand and manage them.
2. **Sensory Warm-up & Grounding:** Distribute play dough. Have students feel, squish, roll, and pull the dough. Guide them to take deep breaths, focusing on the sensory input to feel present.
3. **Sculpting Emotions:** Invite students to sculpt how they are feeling (e.g., anger, happiness) using abstract or direct forms. Encourage vigorous manipulation for strong emotions and gentle shaping for calm. Suggest transforming "angry" dough into something peaceful.
4. **Refinement and Detail (Optional):** Students can add details or transform sculptures using tools or other colors.
5. **Reflect and Share (Optional):** Lead a discussion. Sharing is optional. Ask: "How did it feel to sculpt your emotions? Did it help you understand them or feel calmer?"



Rhythm - Again and Again

Ages: 8+

Type of Art: Music

Goals:

- To encourage focus, active participation, and non-verbal communication within a paired, *repetitive, rhythmic* activity.
- To develop active listening skills and auditory memory through repeating and building rhythmic patterns, supporting *relevant* cognitive and social skills.
- To foster *relational* connection and *respectful* group engagement.

Materials/Set-up:

- Open space for students to form a circle.
- (Optional) Simple percussion instruments (e.g., shakers, clappers, body percussion like snapping/clapping) or just hands/feet.

Directions:

1. Introduce Rhythm Building: Gather students in a circle. Explain they will create a group rhythm together, building it piece by piece by listening and adding on.
2. Establish the Core Concept (2-Beat Add-On): Explain the rule: The first person makes a 2-beat rhythm. Everyone copies it. The next person adds two more beats to the *entire* rhythm (making 4 beats total). Everyone copies the new, longer rhythm. This continues around the circle, always adding two new beats to the accumulated rhythm. Rhythms can use claps, stomps, snaps, pats, or vocal sounds.
3. Start the First Rhythm: Designate a starting student to perform a clear, repeatable 2-beat rhythm.
4. Everyone Copies: The entire group immediately copies that exact 2-beat rhythm in unison, repeating a few times.
5. Adding On (Next Student): The next student adds two more beats and the group repeats those beats and then performs the *entire accumulated rhythm*.
6. Continue the Pattern: Continue this process around the circle until everyone has contributed. If the rhythm gets too long, you can "reset" it back to 2 beats with a new starting student.



Movement – Again and Again

Ages: 8+

Type of Art: Dance

Goals:

- To encourage focus and participation through a shared sequence of *repetitive* movements.
- To promote non-verbal communication and working memory through *rhythm* and patterns.
- To strengthen a sense of group cohesion and *respectful* engagement through turn-taking and shared creativity.

Materials / Set-up:

- Open space for students to form a large circle.
- No props required, though optional music with a steady tempo can be used as a background.

Directions:

1. Introduce the Movement Game: Invite students to form a circle. Let them know they will create a cumulative movement phrase together. Instead of rhythm, they will use simple body movements—like jumps, spins, arm gestures, or body poses.
2. Establish the Core Concept (2-Movement Add-On): Explain the rule:
 - The first person performs a 2-movement phrase (e.g., step-touch, then arm reach).
 - The whole group watches, then repeats that exact 2-movement phrase together.
 - The next person adds 2 more movements to the phrase (e.g., step-touch, arm reach, spin, then squat).
 - The group repeats the full 4-movement phrase together.
 - This continues around the circle, with each person adding two new moves to the growing sequence.
3. Start with a Strong Model: Choose a confident student (or model yourself) to begin with two simple, clear movements.
4. Group Repetition: After each addition, the entire group repeats the full phrase in unison—this supports *body memory* and *group synchrony*.
5. Keep It Manageable: If the sequence becomes too long or confusing, "reset" the game with a new starter and a fresh 2-movement phrase.
6. Reflect: End with a short discussion:
 - What was challenging or fun?
 - How did you keep track of the movements?
 - How did you feel moving together as a group?



Soundscape – “Make it Rain”

Ages: 5+

Type of Art: Music

Goals:

- To foster collaborative creativity and group synchronization through a *rhythmic* “wave” of sound and movement, building *relational* trust.
- To support sensory regulation and group focus through *repetitive* and *rewarding* shared experience.

Materials/Set-up:

- Open space for students to form a circle.

Directions:

1. **Introduce & Demonstrate Sounds:** Gather students in a circle. Explain they'll create rainstorm sounds, building from a single drop to a downpour, then fading. Demonstrate sounds: Light Rain/Drizzle (rub hands), Medium Rain/Pitter-Patter (snap fingers), Heavy Rain/Downpour (pat knees), Thunder/Storm (stomp feet).
2. **Starting the storm:** Designate a starting student to perform the first sound (e.g., rubbing hands). The sound then travels sequentially around the circle. Have the next student make the sound a little bit stronger. Then the next student even stronger, and so on. Think of this like a wave in a stadium.
3. **Build the Storm:** Once the current sound wave completes a full circle, introduce the next sound (e.g., snapping fingers). This new sound also travels in a wave, getting stronger each time. Continue adding sounds in sequence (patting knees, stomping) to build the storm's intensity.
4. **Fade the Rain:** At the storm's peak, signal to reverse the sound sequence, moving back down the intensity scale (e.g., stomping to knee pats, then snaps, then hand rubs), again in a wave around the circle. The sound fades completely as the last student finishes.

Extensions:

- **Different Leaders:** Allow different students to take turns being the "storm leader" who initiates the sounds and signals changes in intensity.
- **Go Backwards:** After a full storm cycle, try having the wave travel in the opposite direction around the circle.
- **Creative Sounds:** Encourage students to invent new "rainstorm" sounds or effects.



Who Started the Motion?

Ages: 6+

Type of Art: Drama, Dance

Goals:

- To develop trust and teamwork in a low-stakes, *relational* group activity.
- To create *rhythm* within the group and develop keen observation skills and non-verbal communication, fostering *respectful* engagement.
- To encourage *repetitive* practice of subtle group dynamics and attention.

Materials/Set-up:

- Open space for students to form a circle.

Directions:

1. Prepare the Guesser: Choose one student to be the "guesser" and send them out of the room.
2. Form Circle & Choose Leader: Students form a tight circle, facing inward. Secretly choose one student as the "leader." Remind the leader to be subtle and avoid eye contact with the guesser.
3. Start Motion: The secret leader begins a simple, repetitive motion (e.g., hand rub, snap, knee pat, stomp, finger wiggle).
4. Everyone Follows: All other students immediately and subtly copy the leader's motion without looking directly at them.
5. Leader Changes Motion: After 5-10 seconds, the leader subtly changes to a new motion. Everyone quickly and quietly switches to the new motion.
6. Bring in Guesser: Once the group performs the second motion smoothly, call the guesser back to the center of the circle.
7. Guess the Leader: The guesser watches. The leader continues to change motions every few seconds, and the group follows. The guesser tries to identify the leader, with three chances to guess.
8. Reveal & New Round: If the guesser finds the leader, that leader becomes the new guesser. If not, the current guesser goes out again, and a new leader is chosen. Continue for several rounds.

Reflect:

- "What strategies did the guesser use to find the leader?"
- "What did the followers do to make it hard for the guesser to find the leader?"

Adaption Tips:

- **Subtlety is Key:** Remind students, especially the leader, to be subtle in their changes.
- **Fair Play:** Emphasize that the goal is fun and observation, not to trick or frustrate the guesser unfairly.
- **Variety of Motions:** Encourage leaders to use a variety of motions (body percussion, small gestures).



Sensory Bin Exploration

Ages: 3+

Type of Art: Visual Art

Goals:

- To provide rich tactile input through material manipulation for grounding and calming, supporting *relevant* sensory integration.
- To encourage *repetitive*, mindful exploration of textures, fostering *rewarding* self-regulation and *respectful* sensory engagement.

Materials/Set-up:

- Large bin or shallow container (e.g., plastic storage bin, sensory table)
- Various textured materials (choose 1-3 types per bin):
 - Dry rice, beans, pasta, lentils
 - Sand, kinetic sand
 - Water beads (ensure safety/supervision for younger children)
 - Smooth stones, pebbles
 - Leaves, small sticks, pinecones
 - Cotton balls, pom-poms, fabric scraps
- Tools for exploration:
 - Scoops, spoons, small cups, bowls
 - Funnels
 - Small toy animals or figures (optional, for imaginative play)

Directions:

1. Prepare the Space: Set up the sensory bin(s) on a table or on the floor. Ensure the area is clean and easily accessible for students.
2. Introduce Exploration: Explain to students that they will be exploring different textures and materials with their hands. "Today, we're going to use our hands to discover all sorts of interesting things in our sensory bin. There's no right or wrong way to play, just explore and see how it feels!"
3. Encourage Sensory Engagement: Invite students to begin exploring the materials.
 - Guide them to simply put their hands into the bin and feel the textures. "How does the sand feel between your fingers? Is it smooth or rough?"
 - Encourage actions like scooping, pouring, sifting, burying hands, or gently arranging the materials. "Can you scoop the rice into a cup? What sound does it make when you pour it?"
 - Emphasize the sensory experience over creating a specific product.

4. Facilitate Calm & Focus: Observe students and gently redirect if they become overstimulated or disengaged. The repetitive nature of scooping and pouring is often naturally calming. Encourage deep breaths if needed.
5. Clean Up: Guide students to carefully return all materials to the bin and clean up any spills.



Textured Collage/Rubbing Art

Ages: 5+

Type of Art: Visual Art

Goals:

- To provide *rewarding*, rich tactile and proprioceptive input through textured rubbing for grounding and sensory integration.
- To encourage *repetitive* exploration of textures and creative expression, supporting *relevant* sensory processing and *respectful* artistic choice.

Materials/Set-up:

- Various textured surfaces (gather a collection):
 - Natural: Leaves (with prominent veins), bark, rough stones, feathers, pinecones, corrugated cardboard
 - Household: Lace, mesh, bubble wrap, sandpaper, coins, keys, graters (use with caution/supervision), textured fabric scraps
- Paper (thinner paper works best for rubbings, e.g., printer paper, tracing paper)
- Crayons (peel off paper wrappers for easier side-rubbing)
- Scissors
- Glue stick or liquid glue
- Larger sheet of paper or cardboard for the collage base

Directions:

1. Introduce Texture Exploration: Discuss textures (smooth, bumpy, rough, soft). Explain students will "collect" textures using crayons for unique artwork.
2. Demonstrate Rubbing Art: Show how to place paper over a textured object. Demonstrate holding a crayon on its side and rubbing firmly to reveal the texture. Encourage experimenting with colors and objects.
3. Texture Collection: Distribute paper and crayons. Provide various textured surfaces. Instruct students to create several rubbings, feeling the texture as they rub.
4. Cut and Arrange for Collage: Students cut out interesting textured shapes from their rubbings. Provide collage base paper. Invite them to arrange pieces, considering how textures look together.
5. Glue the Collage: Once satisfied, students glue their textured pieces onto the collage base.

Adaptation Tips:

- **Variety of Textures:** Offer a wide range of textures to maximize sensory input.
- **Supervision:** For younger children, pre-cut some textured materials or supervise closely during cutting.
- **Process Over Product:** Emphasize the sensory experience of rubbing and feeling the textures over creating a perfect picture.



Passing the Clap

Art Form: Drama

Age Range: 5 +

Goals:

- To support regulation by engaging the body in a rhythmic and repetitive movement that help calm the nervous system.
- To foster relationship and co-regulation, as students rely on one another for timing and connection.
- To create predictable structure repetition, helping the brain build pathways for focus, attention, and motor control.

Materials:

- None required
- Optional: open space for safe movement, drum or metronome for tempo (if adding rhythm support)

Directions:

1. Circle Formation
Students stand in a circle, close enough to make eye contact and clap easily with the person beside them.
2. Modeling
Demonstrate turning to a partner, establishing eye contact, and clapping together once. That person turns to their neighbor and repeats the motion.
3. Practice
Slowly pass the clap around the circle, encouraging students to focus on timing and connection. It's okay if it takes a few tries—mistakes are part of the learning!
4. Challenge & Flow
Once the group gets the hang of it, try to keep the clap moving without verbal cues or pauses. Celebrate moments when the group gets into a flow.
5. Variations
 - Double Clap = Reverse: A double clap signals the group to send the clap in the opposite direction.
 - Sound or Emotion: Add a vocal sound or an expressive face to each clap to deepen creativity and emotional expression.
 - Silent Round: Try the whole activity without speaking or laughing—just listening with the body.

- Movement Add-on: Step into the circle and back while clapping to integrate simple movement.

Reflection Prompts:

- How did it feel when the clap flowed smoothly?
- What helped you stay focused?
- Did you feel connected to your classmates during this activity?
- What was challenging, and how did you overcome it?



Level 2: Limbic

• Relationship •

Level 2 helps develop the limbic system which is the emotional center of the brain, responsible for how we feel, remember, and **relate to others**. This part of the brain plays a major role in how we form emotional bonds, experience empathy, and build trust. When we feel safe and connected, the limbic system supports healthy social interaction and attachment. It helps us read facial expressions, understand others' emotions, and respond with care—making it essential for developing strong relationships and a sense of belonging.

The arts support the limbic system by creating **safe spaces for emotional expression and human connection**. This kind of vulnerability fosters empathy and deepens emotional understanding between people. Collaborative art-making helps build trust, cooperation, and a sense of belonging. These shared creative experiences activate the limbic system in ways that strengthen relationships and emotional integrity, allowing people to feel seen, heard, and connected.

Use Level 2 in order to:

- Develop connections between peers
- Explore emotions and experience empathy
- Demonstrate trust amongst others and within themselves



Human Machine Ensemble

Age Range: 8+

Type of Art: Drama / Dance

Goals:

- To foster creative problem-solving and teamwork through *relational* and *repetitive* collaboration
- To strengthen non-verbal communication through *rhythmic* and *relevant* embodied storytelling
- To build trust and shared focus through *respectful* physical interaction
- To create a *rewarding* group experience through playful, performative invention

Materials:

- Open space for movement
- (Optional) Music or rhythmic sound source (drum beat, metronome, etc.)
- (Optional) Simple props (e.g., scarves, cardboard tubes, costume pieces)

Directions:

1. Introduction to Machines

- Briefly discuss machines with students: What do machines do? How do they move or sound?
- Show examples or mimic mechanical actions together.

2. Machine Movement Warm-Up

- Lead a guided movement session where students practice isolated, repetitive actions (e.g., pistons, conveyor belts, gears).
- Add sounds to match movements.

3. Individual Machine Creation

- Each student invents their own unique “machine part” with:
 - A repeating movement
 - A characteristic sound
 - A clear way to start and stop

4. Forming a Collective Machine

- Divide into small groups (3–6 students).
- Each group links their individual machines together using non-verbal communication (visual cues, spatial awareness, sound timing).
- Encourage students to experiment with how their movements fit together—like gears or levers—into a working system.

5. Machine Performance

- Each group activates their human machine.
- Run the machine for 15–30 seconds and then power it down together.
- Encourage dramatic, rhythmic synchronization and exaggerated expressions.

6. Reflection and Discussion (5–10 min)

Use prompts like:

- What was challenging about building the machine together?
- How did you know when to start or stop your movement?
- What was your machine's purpose?
- What did it feel like to work as one system?

Adaptation:

Work as a whole class. One student goes to the playing space and makes a sound and movement. The class observes and another student goes up to add on to the previous student and so on. You can have some students sit out to observe. “What was the machine making?” “What sounds did you hear?” “How did they work together?”



Mindful Photography

Type of Art: Visual Art

Age Range: 12+

Goals:

- To strengthen emotional awareness and self-expression through *relevant* and *rewarding* personal exploration
- To offer a *respectful*, trauma-sensitive alternative to unhealthy coping behaviors
- To reduce stress and anxiety through *rhythmic* sensory regulation (walking, breathing, focus)
- To build confidence and creative voice through *relational* reflection and optional sharing

Materials:

- Film or digital camera / phone with camera
- Notebook or journal
- (Optional) Headphones, calming music

Directions:

1. Set an Intention (5–10 min)

- Begin with a grounding activity: deep breathing, stretching, or quiet observation.
- Ask students to place one hand on their heart or belly and notice how they're feeling.
- Offer reflection prompts:
 - “What do you want to notice today?”
 - “What emotion are you feeling right now?”
- Introduce a theme for the walk, such as:
 - “Peace”
 - “Light and shadow”
 - “Stillness”
 - “Things that bring you joy”

2. Walk and Observe (15–30 min)

- Invite students to take a mindful walk—either outside or around the school.
- Encourage slowness and sensory awareness:
 - “Notice what you see, hear, smell, or feel.”
- Students take photos based on the intention or theme. Remind them:
 - It's not about *taking a lot*, but *looking deeply*.

3. Reflect and Respond (10–15 min)

- Have students choose 1–3 favorite photos.
- Journal responses to any of the following:
 - What drew you to take this photo?
 - What emotion does it represent?
 - What does this photo say about how your day is going?
 - Did anything surprise you during this walk?

Optional: Students can share their photos and reflections in pairs or as a gallery wall.



Partner Mirror Movement

Age Range: 5+

Type of Art: Drama / Dance

Goals:

- To promote *regulation* by encouraging focused attention and calm, deliberate movement.
- To foster *relationships* through active, cooperative interaction and building trust and *respect* between partners.
- To build *impulse control* by practicing controlled and intentional movements.

Materials:

- Open space large enough for pairs to move comfortably without colliding

Directions:

1. Introduction: Explain that the goal is to work with a partner to create a “mirror” image by copying each other’s movements as precisely and slowly as possible, as if one is the reflection of the other in a mirror.
2. Pair Up: Have students find a partner and stand facing each other about an arm’s length apart.
3. Decide Roles: Assign one student as the “leader” and the other as the “mirror.” The leader will initiate slow, simple movements while the mirror copies exactly, matching timing, expression, and movement quality.
4. Start Mirroring:
 - The leader moves one body part at a time (e.g., raising a hand, tilting the head, stepping sideways) with slow, controlled motions.
 - The mirror carefully observes and copies the movements as if reflected in a mirror.
 - Encourage calm, steady breathing and focus to support regulation and attention.
5. Switch Roles: After a few minutes, pause and have the partners switch roles so both get a chance to lead and mirror.
6. Increase Complexity: As students become comfortable, encourage more complex movements involving the whole body, facial expressions, and changes in levels (high, medium, low).
7. Group Reflection: Bring the group together to share experiences and feelings about the activity. Ask questions like:
 - “How did it feel to follow your partner so closely?”
 - “What did you notice about your own movements when mirroring?”
 - “How did working with a partner help you focus or calm down?”

Extension:

- Try a “group mirror” where a small group follows the movements of one leader simultaneously. This encourages collective focus and synchrony.
- Add music with a slow tempo and encourage students to mirror movements in rhythm with the music.
- Incorporate props (scarves, hats) that move with the participants, increasing complexity and attention to detail.

Adaptations:

- For younger or less coordinated students, keep movements simple and slow.
- Encourage non-verbal communication and gentle encouragement between partners.
- For older students, challenge them with faster or more abstract movements to build impulse control and observational skills.
- Use this activity as a calming or focusing exercise before more active drama work.



Partner Mirror Drawing

Age Range: 6+

Type of Art: Visual Art

Goals:

- To build *relationships* and *respect* by encouraging close attention, cooperation, and mutual responsiveness between partners.
- To support *regulation* by engaging in slow, intentional movement that calms the nervous system.
- To keep the activity *relevant* by making space for student choice in imagery and mark-making.

Materials:

- Large paper (butcher paper or taped-together sheets)
- Markers, crayons, or oil pastels (two per pair, ideally same color)
- Flat surface (floor or table)
- Optional: calming background music

Directions:

1. Setup:
 - Tape a large sheet of paper to a table or the floor.
 - Partners sit or kneel across from one another, each holding a drawing utensil.
 - Draw a light vertical line down the center to divide the paper into mirrored halves.
2. Explain the Concept:
 - One partner will be the “leader” and begin slowly drawing shapes, lines, or images on their half of the paper.
 - The other partner will act as the “mirror,” copying the movement as precisely as possible on their side, as if reflecting it.
 - Emphasize slow, smooth movements and deep focus.
3. Begin Drawing:
 - Start with simple lines or shapes.
 - Encourage partners to maintain soft eye contact and adjust in real time, just like a moving mirror.
 - After a few minutes, invite them to switch roles.

4. Expand the Drawing:

- Allow both students to draw simultaneously—each becoming both leader and mirror, co-creating without one dominant voice.
- Encourage use of color, rhythm in line-making, and imaginative additions.

5. Reflect:

- Invite partners to describe what it felt like to mirror each other.
- Ask: “How did you know what your partner was going to do?” “What surprised you?” “Did your drawing feel connected?”
- Optionally, display the mirrored artwork to celebrate shared effort and focus.

Extension:

- Play slow, calming music to enhance rhythm and regulate pacing.
- Use non-dominant hands for a brain challenge and sensory reset.
- Turn the drawing into a story or scene afterward, encouraging expressive writing or performance based on the image.

Adaptations:

- For younger students, start with finger tracing in the air or on the paper before introducing drawing tools.
- For teens, invite abstract pattern-making, symmetry exploration, or personal symbolism to deepen engagement.
- Use this as a centering activity before transitions or after emotionally charged experiences.



Soundtrack to My Life

Type of Art: Music / Creative Writing

Age Range: 12+

Goals:

- To support emotional expression and self-awareness through *relevant* music-based reflection.
- To foster identity development and storytelling through *rewarding* and *relational* sharing opportunities.
- To provide a *respectful* outlet for personal truth and connection.
- To strengthen pattern recognition and emotional regulation through *rhythmic* listening.

Materials:

- Paper or printable worksheet
- Pens, markers
- Access to music (Spotify, YouTube, etc.)
- Headphones

Directions:

1. Introduce the Concept (5–10 min)
 - Ask: “If your life had a soundtrack, what songs would be on it?”
 - Discuss how music is tied to memory, emotion, and identity.
 - Share an example (e.g., “This song reminds me of my childhood summers.”)
2. Create the Soundtrack (15–20 min)
 - Have students list 5–7 songs that reflect:
 - A childhood memory
 - A song that calms them
 - A hype/energizing song
 - A song that makes them feel understood
 - A song that connects them to someone they love
 - A song that represents who they are today
 - Encourage them to sketch “cover art” that visually represents their playlist.
3. Reflection Writing (optional)
 - Why did you choose these songs?
 - How do these songs tell a story about you?
 - Did you notice any patterns or themes?

4. (Optional) Sharing:

- Students may share 1–2 song choices and what they mean to them.
- You can also create a class playlist of favorite tracks.



Name and Cross Circle / Toss-a-Name

Type of Art: Drama

Age Range: 8+

Goals:

- To build relationships and group cohesion through *relational* and *respectful* name recognition games
- To develop focus and self-regulation through *rhythmic* and *repetitive* movement and sequencing
- To create a playful, *rewarding* entry point to social connection and classroom culture
- To support memory and cognitive development through pattern-based activities

Materials:

- Open space
- (For variation) Soft tossable object

Directions:

1. Name & Cross Circle:

- Students form a standing circle.
- Person A says someone's name across the circle (Person B) and walks toward them.
- Before Person A reaches them, Person B must say another person's name and start walking.
- This continues, creating a chain reaction of name-calling and crossing.
- Increase challenge: add multiple crossings at once or introduce movement styles.

2. Toss-a-Name Variation:

- Let students that they are going to create a pattern.
- Students sit or stand in a circle.
- Person A tosses a soft object while saying Person B's name.
- Person B replies "Thank you, [A]" and tosses to someone new.
- Continue until all names are used. Tip: When someone's name is used, have them sit down so that they are not chosen again.
- Once all names have been used, have the group stand up and see if they can remember who they threw the object to and who they received it from.
- Do the pattern again without people sitting and just keeping the pattern going.
- Add challenge: use multiple objects, create a memorized pattern, or change the order.



Poison Rhythm

Type of Art: Music / Dance

Age Range: 8+

Goals:

- To enhance listening and rhythmic memory through *repetitive* and *rhythmic* practice.
- To strengthen attention and inhibitory control in a *rewarding*, game-like format.
- Build group connection through shared focus and *relational* musical play.
- Promote sensory regulation through structured beat-based interaction.

Materials:

- Open space or desks
- Clapping hands or simple instruments
- Metronome (optional)
- Visual cue card (optional) for "poison rhythm"

Directions:

1. Introduce the Concept

- “I’m going to teach you a rhythm that you must **NOT** repeat. This is the ‘poison rhythm.’”
- Demonstrate the rhythm with claps, stomps, or sounds. Repeat it several times and have students practice it until students recognize it.

2. Rhythm Echo Game

- Call-and-response: You (or students) clap rhythms for the group to echo.
- If someone echoes the poison rhythm, they’re “out” or the round restarts.
- Continue until students can consistently avoid it.

3. Student-Led Version

- Students take turns being the leader.
- Each leader creates new rhythms or tries to trick classmates with the poison rhythm.

Optional Challenge: Add a beat or background music to increase focus.



Speed Meeting / Concentric Circles

Type of Art: Drama

Age Range: 8+

Goals:

- To build interpersonal connection through *relational* and *respectful* communication.
- To encourage vulnerability and self-expression through *rewarding* peer-to-peer exchanges.
- To promote empathy and active listening through *repetitive* practice with multiple partners.

Materials:

- Open space

Directions:

1. Set Up

- Form two circles: an inner circle facing out and an outer circle facing in.
- Each person has a partner directly across from them.

2. Ask Questions

- Ask a question like:
 - “What’s your favorite song right now?”
 - “What’s something you’re proud of?”
 - “What’s a goal you have this year?”
- Give 2–3 minutes for each pair to talk.
- After each round, the outer circle rotates one spot to the right, meeting a new partner.

3. Group Debrief (5 min)

- Ask:
 - What did you learn about others?
 - Did you find anything in common?
 - How did it feel to talk and be listened to?



Level 3: Cortex

• Resiliency •

Level 3 strengthens the frontal cortex which is responsible for focus, attention, higher-level thinking and problem-solving—all skills essential for success in school. This area supports **risk-taking** by weighing potential rewards and consequences, encouraging learning and exploration. It also fosters **autonomy** by enabling self-awareness and independent decision-making. Additionally, the frontal cortex helps with emotional regulation and understanding social cues, which aids in managing relationships with teachers and peers. Together, these functions make it key to learning, adapting, and thriving in any environment.

The arts help the frontal cortex by engaging skills like planning, problem-solving, and self-control. Arts activities also encourage focus, decision-making and risk-taking in a safe environment, supporting creativity and independent thinking. Through collaboration and reflection, the arts build autonomy and social understanding, helping individuals develop better emotional regulation and thoughtful life choices.

Use Level 3 in order to:

- Build problem-solving and decision-making skills for themselves and in groups
- Cultivate positive life choices and independent thinking
- Foster reflection and emotional regulation through difficult situations



"I Am" Poem

Age Range: 8+

Type of Art: Creative Writing

Goals:

- To support *regulation* by connecting students with familiar sensory experiences from their personal backgrounds.
- To build *relationships* and *respect* by encouraging sharing of diverse cultural or familial roots through imagery.
- To foster *relevance* through *reflection* and *reasoning* by deepening self-awareness and encouraging thoughtful expression of identity.
- To nurture *repetition* and *rhythm* in language for confidence and fluency in storytelling.

Materials:

- Writing paper or notebooks
- Pens, pencils, or digital devices
- Optional: drawing or collage materials to visualize place-based imagery

Directions:

1. **Introduce the Concept:** Explain that this poem is about the special places, memories, and sensory experiences that shape who they are—"where they are from." Share an example poem or a few lines that use rich imagery to describe a place and what it feels like to be from there.
2. **Prompt Sensory Reflection:** Ask students to think about the places they come from—this could be their home, neighborhood, town, or somewhere meaningful to them. Encourage them to remember sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and feelings connected to that place.
3. **Provide a Template or Sentence Starters:**
 - I am from (a place, an object, or a feeling)
 - I see (visual details from that place)
 - I hear (sounds familiar to that place)
 - I smell (scents that remind me of home)
 - I taste (flavors from my culture or home)
 - I feel (sensations or emotions tied to this place)
 - I remember (a special memory or tradition)
 - I am from (repeat to reinforce identity)

4. **Writing Time:** Let students write their poems, emphasizing imagery that evokes strong sensory connections.
5. **Sharing and Discussion:** Offer space for volunteers to share their poems aloud. Discuss the diversity and richness of different places and backgrounds.
6. **Optional Creative Extension:** Students can create a visual artwork, collage, or digital image inspired by their poem to further express “where they are from.”

Extension:

For a more abstract poem, each of the starting lines of the prompts can be “I am” instead of “I hear” etc... For example, “I am white laundry hanging on the line.” Or “I am the bouncing of basketballs down the street.”



Tableaux

Age Range: 6+

Type of Art: Drama

Goals:

- To foster *regulation* by encouraging stillness and mindfulness within a group setting.
- To build *relationships* and *respect* through collaborative creation of shared images and stories.
- To promote *reasoning* and *reflection* by interpreting and analyzing the meaning behind posed scenes.
- To encourage *repetition* and *rhythm* through repeated practice of poses and storytelling sequences.
- To support *relational* skills by developing non-verbal communication and empathy within the group.

Materials:

- Open space (classroom, gym, or outdoor area)
- Optional: simple props or costume pieces to enhance scenes

Directions:

1. **Introduce Tableaux:** Explain that a tableaux (pronounced “ta-blow”) is a “living picture” where students use their bodies to create a frozen scene that tells a story or expresses an idea through facial expressions, body language, levels (high, medium, low), and proximity (how close or far apart they stand).
2. **Warm-Up:** Lead students through gentle stretching and movement to prepare for stillness and posing.
3. **Build the Tableaux One at a Time:**
 - One student steps into the space and strikes a pose that expresses a part of the story or theme using clear facial expression and body language.
 - That student “freezes” in place.
 - The next student steps in and adds their own pose in relationship to the first—considering levels and proximity—to build the scene collaboratively.
 - This continues one student at a time, with each adding to and interacting with the existing poses to create relationships and layers within the tableau.
4. **Hold the Pose:** Once all students have joined, the group holds the frozen image together silently for 10–30 seconds, creating a living picture that conveys a story or emotion.

5. **Observation and Reflection:** Invite the group or audience to observe and interpret the tableau. Discuss the emotions, relationships, and story being expressed through the poses and positioning.
6. **Unfreeze & Share:** Students can “unfreeze” one by one to describe their role, expression, or the relationship they created with others in the tableau.
7. **Repeat & Remix:** Try creating new tableaux with different themes, poses, or groupings to explore various stories or ideas.

Extension:

- The teacher can gently tap a student on the shoulder during the frozen tableau to prompt them to briefly move, make a sound, or add a short line of dialogue that their character, animal, or object might say or express. This brings the tableau momentarily to life, adding depth and encouraging creativity, listening, and spontaneity.

Adaptation Tips:

- For younger students, keep poses simple and use familiar stories or emotions.
- Encourage attention to facial expressions and body language to convey feelings clearly.
- For older students, introduce abstract or symbolic tableaux that invite deeper interpretation.
- Use music or soundscapes to inspire mood before freezing into tableaux.



Letter Alliteration Art

Age Range: 8+

Type of Art: Visual Art

Goals:

- To challenge students in developing vocabulary by creating a visual piece with *repetitive* initial sounds.
- To relate to each other through collaboration, promoting *relationship*.
- To feel a sense of reward and accomplishment through their creative process, emphasizing *respect*.

Materials (May use one or more):

- Digital option: computer or tablet with publishing or drawing software
- Poster Board; Markers; Paints; Magazines

Directions:

- Students will be given a topic (such as a place to research or their own names).
- Students may use a dictionary or the internet to find words that start with the same letter as their topic to ensure understanding of each word.
- Using the materials provided, students will create a visual piece of art that shows the letter of their topic.

Example:

"Beautiful Bangladesh Blossoms Brightly"

- Alliteration: The repetition of the initial "B" sound in the phrase.
- Topic: The country of Bangladesh.
- Art Connection: This phrase could be used as the title or theme for artwork depicting the beauty and vibrancy of Bangladesh. The alliteration adds a catchy and memorable quality to the title, enhancing artistic impact.



Emoji/Symbol Decipher

Age Range: 8+

Type of Art: Visual Art

Goals:

- To build *relationships* by creating and solving emoji or symbol-coded messages.
- Students develop problem-solving and decoding skills through *rhythm* and *repetition* of symbolic communication.
- Students experience a sense of accomplishment and belonging, supporting *respect*.

Materials (May use one or more):

- Computer/Tablet with access to emoji icons OR students can draw or cut out emojis
- Paper
- Glue
- Writing utensil

Directions:

- Instruct students to create a coded message using emojis or other symbols.
- Students show their finished message to the teacher/adult before others attempt to decipher it.
- Completed messages are numbered and placed around the room.
- Students walk around and decipher each message, writing answers on paper next to the corresponding number.
- When finished, students return to seats; the teacher may review answers with the class.



Telephone Dance

Age Range: 5+

Type of Art: Dance

Goals:

- To practice self-discipline, impulse control, and turn-taking, cultivating *regulation* and *repetition*.
- To build *respectful* peer relationships through shared focus and cooperation.
- To gain confidence and self-awareness through controlled movement.

Materials:

- Open space

Directions:

- Similar to the game telephone, students line up facing one direction.
- Optionally, have one or two students act as silent *raters* to observe if movements are repeated properly.
- The second student from the back turns around and focuses on the last student, who makes a dance movement toward them.
- Everyone else maintains self-control by facing away, waiting their turn.
- The second student repeats the last student's movement and adds their own, showing the next person.
- Turns continue until the front student performs the full sequence.
- Practice with suggested movements first; challenge students to create their own as memory improves.
- Younger students may play sitting, using emotion faces instead of dance moves to build self-control foundations.



Animal Beat

Age Range: 7+

Type of Art: Dance / Music

Goals:

- To enhance rhythm, coordination, and memory through repeated animal gestures, emphasizing *rhythm* and *repetition*.
- They foster social skills and teamwork via collaborative play, reinforcing *relationship*.
- To encourage confidence and adaptability, nurturing *respect* and *reasoning skills*.

Materials:

- Open space

Directions:

Variation 1: Zoo

- Players sit or stand in a circle, each choosing an animal with a unique hand gesture.
- One player starts with a 1-2-3 rhythm (slap thighs twice, clap on third beat).
- All shout “One, two, let's play Zoo!” and follow the rhythm.
- The starting player performs their animal gesture on the third beat.
- In following rounds, the active player performs another's gesture to catch them off guard.
- The targeted player must respond with their gesture, then pass it on.
- Players clap the rhythm when it's not their turn.
- Failing to maintain rhythm or gesture leads to elimination.
- The last player standing wins.

Variation 2: King Elephant (Advanced)

- Players sit in a circle with assigned animals in a food chain order.
- The King Elephant starts a 1-2-3-4 rhythm: pat knee, clap, own animal gesture, then another's.
- Players respond with their animal gesture and pass on a new one.
- Funny animal sounds encouraged.
- Mistakes lead to becoming the “worm,” others move up.
- Goal: move up the chain to become King Elephant.



Music Sleuth / Guess the Leader

Age Range: 8+

Type of Art: Music

Goals:

- To improve observation, communication, and quick thinking through rhythmic imitation, supporting *rhythm*, *repetition*, and *regulation*.
- To build collaboration, trust and social connection, emphasizing *relationship*.
- To exercise creativity and *respect* for group dynamics.

Materials:

- Open space

Directions:

- Form a circle, ensuring all see each other.
- Select one guesser to leave the room or close eyes.
- Secretly choose a leader from remaining players.
- Leader begins simple actions (clapping, snapping, stomping).
- Others copy leader immediately.
- Leader periodically changes actions, others follow quickly.
- Guesser returns, stands in the middle of the circle and tries to identify leader within 3 guesses.
- Correct guesser becomes new leader; select new guesser.



Story Building “Yes, and Then”

Age Range: 5+

Type of Art: Drama

Goals:

- To engage in collaborative storytelling, practicing *relationship* and listening through “Yes, And...” responses.
- To foster creativity and abstract thinking through *rhythm* and *repetition*, fostering creativity and abstract thinking.
- To experience safety and *respect* in shared narrative creation.

Materials:

- Open space
- Writing materials

Directions:

1. **Set the Scene:** Groups or whole class agree on basic characters, setting, and situation.
2. **Start the Story:** One student begins with a statement about the scene.
3. **“Yes, and then...” Responses:** Each player adds to the story starting with “Yes, and then...”, building on prior ideas.
4. Continue until all have contributed.

Extension: Students can extend the story onto paper, writing the story that they just created together, adding on, or changing it slightly.



Poetry Slam

Age Range:13+

Type of Art: Drama

Goals:

- To connect emotionally with an audience, fostering *relationship* and *respect* through expressive performance.
- To strengthen cognitive and creative skills through writing and performing poetry involving *rhythm* and *repetition*.
- To build confidence through a safe and calm environment for sharing.

Materials:

- Writing materials (paper or digital)

Directions:

Preparation:

1. Choose a theme (e.g., “self-expression,” “nature,” “a better world”).
2. Establish rules: original work, time limits, no props.
3. Provide writing and practice time.
4. Recruit open-minded judges.
5. Prepare a performance space.
6. Encourage practice for confidence.

Event Day:

1. Introduce the slam and judging criteria.
2. Assign performance order.
3. Students perform within time limits.
4. Judges score content, delivery, originality.
5. Announce winners and recognize all performers.
6. Offer positive feedback emphasizing creativity and bravery.



Gesture Dance

Ages: 8+

Type of Art: Dance

Goals:

- To support self-awareness and self-expression through personal, meaningful gesture-based movement.
- To build *relational* connection through sharing and blending movement ideas with a partner.
- To strengthen regulation and resilience by offering a creative outlet for emotion and routine, and encouraging flexible thinking and collaboration.

Materials / Set-up:

- Open space. (Optional: light background music to support movement flow.)

Description:

1. **Personal Gesture Creation:** Ask students to reflect on what they typically do when they get home from school—e.g., hang their backpack, grab a snack, flop on the couch, pet a dog, etc. Invite them to choose 3 *clear gestures or movements* that represent their after-school routine. Each gesture should be repeated once or twice and linked together smoothly to create a short personal "gesture dance." Tell students to make the gestures larger than life, using space and time.
2. **Practice the Solo Dance:** Give students a few minutes to explore and refine their gesture dance. Encourage them to use their full body, make each gesture distinct, and repeat the sequence a few times to commit it to memory.
3. **Partner Share & Combine:** Pair students up. Each student performs their gesture dance for their partner. Then, the pair works together to **combine** their two dances into one sequence. They may choose to:
 - Do one dance after the other (A then B),
 - Intertwine gestures from both, or
 - Mirror each other during certain parts.
4. **Rehearse and Perform:** Give pairs time to practice their new duet version of the gesture dance. If time allows, invite pairs to perform their combined dances for the group.
5. **Reflect (Optional):** Lead a brief reflection:
 - What did you notice about your partner's gestures?
 - Was it easy or hard to combine your dances?
 - How did it feel to move in a way that reflects your daily life?